THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL NOTES/NOTAS TEORETICAS Y METODOLÓGICAS

A PUSH - PULL MODEL OF ETHNIC (RE)CONFIGURATION IN A PLURAL SOCIETY: TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
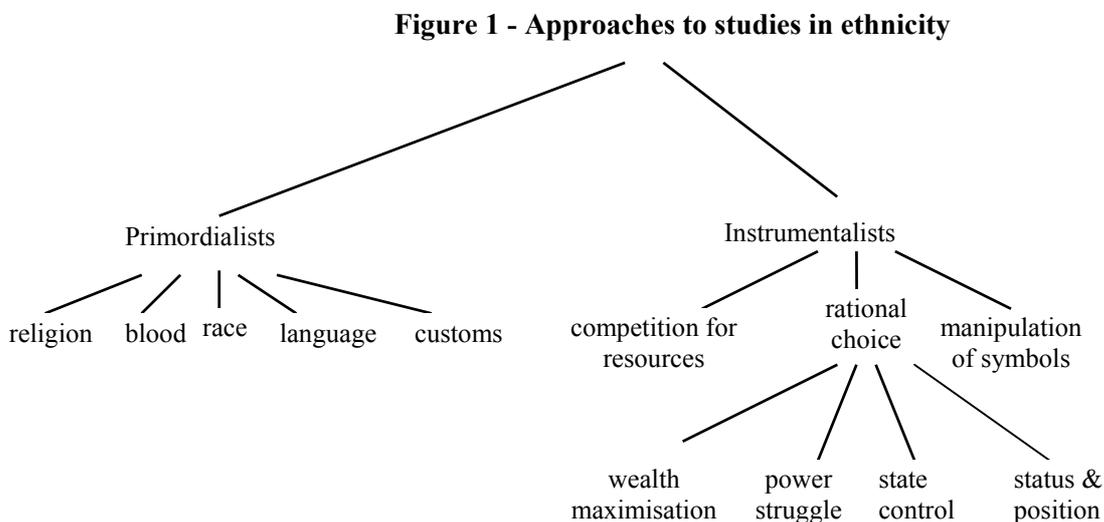
Akhil Malaki

I. INTRODUCTION: APPROACHES TO STUDIES IN ETHNICITY

The purpose of this essay is to attempt an analysis - albeit a preliminary one - of the shifting ethnic configurations in the plural society of Trinidad and Tobago with the help of a push-pull model. It basically argues that the boundaries of ethnic groups and identities can be fluid and can be redrawn depending on external and internal factors. These two factors, which I call push and pull factors, can alter the configuration of ethnic relations. External in the sense of forces that ethnic groups have little control over and yet these forces influence their behavior (colonialism, capitalist penetration, globalization and regionalization). Internal in the sense their relationships with other social groups with whom they have to coexist and even compete, politically and economically, within a national territory. A brief historical sketch is provided to illustrate how ethnic configurations have taken shape in Trinidad during the colonial and the post-colonial periods. The latter half of this presentation alludes to the impact of the current processes of globalization and regional integration on ethnic (re)configuration. The push-pull model used in this essay is adapted from Albert O. Hirschman's (1979), *Shifting Involvements*. This is a dynamic model that helps explain changes and (re)configurations in ethnic relations.

There are two approaches in studies on ethnicity: primordialists and instrumentalists. The primordialists attribute ethnicity to ties of religion, blood, race, language, region and customs. The instrumentalists treat ethnicity as a social, political and cultural resource for different interest and status groups. For the instrumentalists, ethnicity is a 'social construct'. In this view, the social content of ethnicity can vary a lot depending on what I

identify as 'push-pull factors' - i.e. circumstances under which ethnic identities undergo transitions or ethnic (re)configurations. (Figure 1 below summarizes the two approaches).

Figure 1 - Approaches to studies in ethnicity

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                                Primordialists                                    Instrumentalists

        religion    blood    race    language    customs        competition for      rational       manipulation
                                                                   resources          choice         of symbols

                                                                          wealth        power      state      status &
                                                                       maximisation    struggle   control    position
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When it concerns ethnicity, one is not talking about what people are like, but rather how and for what particular purposes they identify themselves along ethnic lines. In this sense, the primordialist approach can be of little help, as it will be shown in the discussion that follows. Thomas Hylland-Eriksen (1993:1) aptly remarks that ethnicity emerges through social situations and encounters, and through people's ways of coping with demands and challenges of life - social, political and economic. Ethnic identities are neither ascribed nor achieved; they are both. They are wedged between situational selection and imperatives imposed from without.

II. ETHNICITY AND PLURAL SOCIETY THEORY

Caribbean societies have been categorized as plural societies wherein differential incorporation of social groups has established a kind of hierarchy based on inequalities in the society's public domain - i.e. a kind of differential level of social access to public benefits and facilities. Inclusion is segmental that assumes prior identification of individual with the group it incorporates.

Lloyd Braithwaite has written about stratification in Trinidad. He rejects the plural society theory as a loose concept. The important point he makes is that the social structure in Trinidad is founded on 'ascriptive-particularistic basis'. To quote Braithwaite (1953:49);

"Ethnic affiliation and ethnic purity were the values upon which the social stratification system was erected and, therefore, this served as a positive encouragement to non-Negro groups to try to retain their ethnic identity".

M.G.Smith (1991:18) notes, however, that while a society may have equal access to common 'public domain' and share a same political culture, they can differ institutionally in the 'private domain'. The former he calls as *de jure* and the latter, *de facto*.

"Cultural pluralism only occurs outside plural societies when collectivities incorporated universalistically in a common society differ in their basic private institutions. In plural societies such differences always involve institutions of the public domain. Societies that differentially incorporate one or more collectivities are thereby constituted as plural, as are those consociations whose segments differ institutionally or in the public status of their members".

Social pluralism is therefore illustrated by the incorporation of 'institutionally diverse segments'. He seems to suggest that the differential incorporation of populations is 'institutionally plural'. In short, a plural society is one in which groups differ in basic institutions such as language, kinship, family, marriage, education, property, religion and organizations. These are the private domains or *de facto*. The difference between social and structural pluralism is that in the former, groups differing institutionally are incorporated segmentally and draw cultural boundaries. In the latter case, the incorporation of institutionally diverse sections form a hierarchic plurality. The very existence of institutional differences make these societies culturally plural. It is worth quoting Smith at length:

"...pluralism in any mode denotes contexts in which institutionally distinct collectivities are incorporated together to form societies. Cultural pluralism obtains when universalistically incorporated collectivities differ in basic institutions, of the private domain, without affecting their members' status in the societal public domain. Social pluralism obtains when institutionally distinct collectivities are incorporated consociationally as coordinate segments in the public domain of a common society, de facto or de jure. Structural pluralism involves the differential incorporation of institutionally distinct collectivities with radically unequal status and rights in the common public domain. While cultural pluralism occurs outside of plural societies, social and structural pluralism constitute pluralities of diverse types, the segmental and hierarchic; and their modes of incorporation, if combined, produce such complex pluralities as colonial Trinidad and Guyana..." (Smith 1991:22).

Stinchcombe (1995:278-283) observes that the number of systems of institutions existing within a common public domain is a reminiscence of the 'pluralism of empire culture'. The ethnic pluralism that enters the political system is to a large extent the projection of communal institutional diversity that can develop political interests. Daniel Bell (1996:138) also points out that within plural societies there is the "existence of segmented

sociological groups which can establish effective cultural and political cohesion and make cultural, economic or political claims on the society on the basis of that group identity".

Plural societies in many parts of the world have emerged as a concomitant product of colonialism wherein certain groups were forcefully subjugated into a society. This is particularly so in the Caribbean case. The origins of Caribbean plural societies lay in the economic necessities of the plantation system that has not only increased social and economic inequalities, but also accentuated ethnic identities and conflicts even within the framework of liberal democracy that emerged after colonialism. The plantation society in the Caribbean differentially incorporated masters and slaves as social sections, each separate and institutionally distinct. These societies were hierarchic and structurally pluralistic. Later, the introduction of indentured East Indian and Chinese labor also fell along this pattern of structural pluralism (Malaki 1996).

III. COLONIALISM AND ETHNIC CONFIGURATION

The two islands - Trinidad and Tobago - entered the family of British Caribbean at a very late stage of colonization. Trinidad and Tobago had already a mixed population of white creole planters (French and Spanish), slaves and freedmen. Trinidad had a distinct pattern of agricultural regionalization. The south was basically sugar monoculture. The northern hills marked by cocoa and coffee cultivation. Thus, we see a kind of regional distinction between sugar monoculture and small-scale diversified agriculture. The population and economy of the island showed diversity.[1] The total population of Trinidad in 1797 was 17,643. Of these, whites numbered 2,086, free people of color 4,466, Amerindians 1,082 and African slaves 10,009 (Williams 1962: 47).

The pressing issue facing Trinidad, as well as other colonies, after emancipation was that of labor. The Crown government in collusion with planters came up with a plan to resolve the acute shortage of plantation labor - importation of labor from Asia on the basis of "contract" (indentureship) - mostly recruited from India. It is important to note that East Indian labor that was introduced to compete with Creole labor ended up as a group of landowners with a distinct ethnic identity. By the end of 1855, there were about 2,000 East Indians with certificates of industrial residence, but only 509 were on yearly contracts.

There were some distinct structural changes in Trinidad's economy in

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[1] For a more detailed study of the emerging socioeconomic structure in Trinidad under colonialism, see Malaki (1996).

the latter half of nineteenth century. By 1897, British firms owned most of the productive estates. French Creole ownership in sugar declined in a very dramatic way, from 31 percent in 1871 to 5 percent by 1895. In a matter of two decades, the English absentee firms had almost nearly displaced the French Creole in ownership. The French Creoles had sold out to English individuals and concerns. The French Creoles shifted to cocoa cultivation. In 1875, out of the 29 cocoa estates registered, 75.8 percent were owned by French Creoles and in 1895, 72 percent. Cocoa remained in French creole hands. With the cocoa boom, the French creoles became firmly entrenched in the islands import-export business.

At this time there was another major transformation in the agricultural sector. Between 1885 and 1896, 24 percent of all Crown land sales were made to East Indians to encourage them to settle. This increased to 34 percent between 1891 and 1895. At least 37,256 acres of Crown lands were sold to East Indians between 1885 and 1900. In the early twentieth century, 56,311 acres were owned by East Indian farmers. There was a transformation into a distinct East Indian peasantry (Brereton 1979:181).

The Trinidadian society was culturally complex as it consisted of a white elite divided into two groups - French and Spanish Creoles (Catholics) and English Creoles (Anglican). Then there was the intermediate Afro-Creole (colored and black creoles), and a distinct East Indian group. The cultural differences between the creoles and East Indians were pronounced. By 1946, population of Trinidad and Tobago was composed of 261 485 blacks, 95 747 East Indians, 15 288 whites, 5 641 Syrians and other Asiatic and another 889 Chinese. Thus, the pluralism in Trinidad is socioeconomic.

V. NATIONALISM AND ETHNIC MOBILIZATION

With the rise of nationalism, ethnicity also became more pronounced in the formation of political parties and trade unions. The configuration of ethnic relations resulted in the labor unions split along ethnic lines and political parties: the Oil Field Workers Trade Union represented the blacks who were of majority in this industry and the All Trinidad Sugar Estates and Factory Workers Trade Union representing the East Indians who were of majority in the sugar industry. The 1946 elections had several parties contending, some of which were formed along ethnic lines – the West Indian National Party (basically Anglo-American), the TLP, The Trades Union Council and Socialist Party, The People's Democratic Party and the United Front (East Indian). Divisions were strong within all these parties. The East Indians were divided over religion (Hindu-Muslim) and between rural and urban; the blacks were divided over class and revivalist (Black

Power) movements and the Christians; the whites were divided between French, English and Portuguese as well as along Protestant-Catholic lines. In this sense, a united national movement was a far fetched reality in Trinidad and the nationalism that took shape in Trinidad was 'fragmented' along the above lines (Lewis 1962:2-30; Ryan 1991:58-79)

The emergence and consolidation of the Peoples National Movement under the leadership of Dr. Eric Williams brought about a new social equation. This period marked the consolidation of power, a process of state-building and progress of a technocracy of an administrative elite in public service loyal to Williams (Sutton 1984). The East Indians perceived the PNM as black-dominated and countered it by the formation of an East Indian Hindu-dominated Democratic Labor Party (DLP) as the major opposition. The DLP lacked any concrete program and ideology and accused the PNM of recruiting mostly blacks into state sector jobs.

The economic pattern that emerged in Trinidad was that of a 'state capitalism' (Ralph 1989:69-110). The need for regulating the process of capital accumulation in pursuing desired nationalist goals of the PNM gave rise to greater state control over the economy and the oil sector. The state acted as a supporting institution for private capital, which turned out be become powerful economic conglomerates. The small private sector became dependent on the pubic sector. Between 1950 and 1966, the industrialization program created around 350 industries and 15,000 direct jobs, and about half as many indirect employment. The policy of industrialization by invitation in Trinidad resulted in a small, and relatively well-paid, unionized working class (labor aristocracy) co-existing with a large surplus of labor, most of whom were unemployed and a peasantry comprising mostly of East Indians. The disparities between East Indian and the African elements were also evident in the area of small business and educational achievements. The former were quite conspicuously absent in the area of commerce, manufacturing and in the public sector. They were mainly concentrated in rural agriculture. The Afro-Trinidadians, however, controlled state power and dominated other productive sectors of the economy.

The State distributional objectives in Trinidad were targeted through direct transfers to the disadvantaged groups via employment creation in the public sector projects. During the oil boom period, the lower income groups and the Afro-Trinidadians benefited directly through such transfers. Thus, various social groups became differentially tied to the state sector as source of income, thereby accentuating inter-group inequality. The privileged and the underprivileged readily identified themselves along ethnic lines making redistribution policy highly sensitive.

The multi-million investments in resource based industries generated employment for only 1 694 persons. The PNM economic policies benefited the middle class, the business community and the upwardly mobile Indo-Indian segments who also became supporters of the regime. The crisis in 1980s, however, witnessed a break in the monopoly of the PNM and the emergence of a loose coalition in the Organization for National Reconstruction (ONR) and later the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR) - a political accommodation of Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians. What is even more significant is in the most recent elections is the election of a member of the Indo-Trinidadian community as Prime Minister - for the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. The campaign this time was on a multi-ethnic platform and consensus-building.

The brief sketch above illustrates that instead of a hierarchical ordering of racial groups a vertical line of division emerged where people in comparable or equal class (wealth) positions but of different ethnic groups began competing with each other (Hoetnik 1985). The establishment of competitive politics along the liberal democratic model has given all the groups political equality. But this has not stopped the groups' political mobilization along ethnic lines. The economic policies in the last three decades have opened opportunities for upward mobility of all groups who could take advantage. The jobs in the state bureaucracy which in the early stages were occupied by Afro-Trinidadians, recruited perhaps on the basis of political patronage,[1] is no longer exclusive today. Even in the area of the professions, all ethnic groups have entered and are represented. Thanks to the education policy, the differences in occupational structure and educational levels are less pronounced. Studies by Percy Hintzen indicate that race has become less politically significant among the middle and upper classes in Trinidad. 67 percent of both white and East Indian business and professional elite supported the black-dominated PNM from the 1970s onward (Hintzen 1985:107-163; 1989). But does this mean ethnicity has become less significant?

During a recent fieldwork in Trinidad, I got the strong impression of latent ethnic apprehensions[2], as well as strive for revival of Indian culture[3]. It was also interesting to note that there is a conscious and increasing effort to reconnect with India and the Hindu religion. Several of these efforts are financed by the economically well-off Indo-Trinidadian community. This indicates that economic prosperity has indirectly contributed to this revival of Indian culture. But this revival is taking place in a creolized context of Trinidad that is also pointed out by Hylland-Eriksen (1992). It appears that even the Presbyterian Indo-Trinidadians are being "re-Hinduised". Premdas and Sitahal (1991:347) in their survey observe in the following words;

"many of these Presbyterians are beginning to seek their roots within their ancient Indian culture in reaction to Creole assertion of a rediscovered African identity and the subsidies and biases of the state of Calypso".

Hutchinson and Smith (1996:133) make a valid statement when they state that ethnic ties can be revived not simply as a result of the plural nature of societies, but that ethnicity combines affect with material interests. This is quite true in the Trinidadian context. While the economic boundaries may have been redrawn, the Indo-Trinidadians still seem to be act ethnically in politics, however creolized they may be (Ryan, 1991:113-144). In addition, economic mobility and progress among the Indo-Trinidadians need not necessarily mean erosion of their ethnic identity. On the contrary it can increase cultural ethnic-consciousness in the form of cultural revitalization.

VI. GLOBALIZATION AND REGIONALIZATION: ETHNIC RE-CONFIGURATION?

An additional question that should to be raised, in the present context, is about the implications of maintaining open trade regimes on various regional ethnic groups. Trade liberalization is assumed to increase efficiency, competitiveness and scale economies. The more economies open up, the less there is full inclusiveness of regions, population groups, and sectors in the benefits of liberalization which can precipitate other consequences. The distribution of the benefits of liberalization and integration accrue to the highly skilled groups in the countries within the region. This naturally increases the income disparities within individual societies and between integrating countries. Some social groups are able to take advantage of new market opportunities, but the conditions of other groups may continue to deteriorate. This, in itself, can create problems as differentially placed social groups compete for scarce economic resources. The forces of economic globalization threaten established domestic social institutions and social cohesion (Rodrik 1997; Castells 1998:chap. 2; Slaughter & Swagel 1997).

Traditionally, small Caribbean economies are open and highly vulnerable to external shocks created by the process of globalization. This has its implications on the peoples in the region. In the Caribbean, the industries and manufacturing in the tradable sector cannot absorb labor, especially the unskilled and semi-skilled. The state has been the major employer. This gives rise to other political and social problems. These problems can be regarded as 'spillover' effects of globalization and regionalization. By this I mean that as various aspects of global, national

and regional political economy get interconnected, problems in one area give rise to problems or require solutions in another. Liberalization displaces labor and this displaced labor is not 'automatically' integrated by opening of markets. The issue of 'productively integrating' them is central for stability and sustained economic growth of the integrating countries and the region. Failure to do this may manifest themselves in conflicts among various groups. It is in this crucial area that the danger of an upsurge of ethnic conflicts lie.

Regionalism in the Western Hemisphere also implies control of labor flows and a tight labor market. Approaches to integration are now evaluating strategies which combine greater competitiveness, liberalization, and structural adjustment with "broader opening to previously marginalized social groups, economic activities, and sub regions in the context of full exchange" (Reynolds 1996). Even if the various regional integration schemes agree to open the labor market to member countries, it means imposing restrictions to labor migration from outside the regional framework. We know that migration in the Caribbean has helped to diffuse tensions and put the lid on the constantly increasing unemployment levels. When restrictions on entry of Caribbean peoples are enforced in other regional integration schemes, like European Union and NAFTA for instance, there is going to be an excess of labor force competing for the scarce jobs and resources within the respective small CARICOM countries. Secondly, even if the labor market is opened within the CARICOM framework, there is going to be inter-regional labor migration having similar consequences.

The Braithwiate-type of stratification does not exist in today's Trinidad and wider Caribbean. But the emergence of a new form of stratification based on labor skills seems imminent owing to the processes of globalization and regionlization which have indeed induced structural changes (Rodriks 1997). Daniel Bell (1996:142) has quite rightly noted that the change in technical skills is giving rise to a "double-based economic class system, of property and skills, in the society". Paul Brass (1996:304) has indicated in the case of India that conflict between educated groups in search of scarce jobs is a prevalent source of ethnic conflict. If this is the case of a large country like India, one begins to wonder if this would not also be a source of immediate concern in small pluralist countries in the Caribbean having to cope with the effects of globalization and regionalization?

VII. CONCLUSIONS

By way of summing up, colonialism and globalization (push factors) have configured ethnic relations. Colonialism has laid the foundation of ethnic pluralism in Trinidad basically along Afro-, Indo- and Mixed-Trinidadians. This pluralism is expressed in several ways (pull factors): different religions, belief systems, social practices, sectional politics, economic competition based on ethnicity. It has also led to adaptation of creole culture and as well as cultural revival, in religion mostly (Stewart, 1991:154). Paradoxically, boundary maintenance (ethnic revitalization) and boundary transcendence (cultural 'creolization') seem to be occurring at the same time among Indo-Trinidadians. It was evident here that pluralism in a liberal democratic model can maintain both nationalism and ethnic configurations in varied forms. Secondly, the creole culture has penetrated all segments of the society and co-exists with alternative cultural streams that precede it, and in current context is influenced by popular North American style and custom. But its distinct 'local' cultural content will remain as Patterson (1996) argues. He believes that the "Americanization" in the Third World is reinterpreted in the local cultural contexts.

In the context of economic globalization, the process of formation of ethnic boundaries also has to take into consideration economic situations of various groups within the society. A rise or decline of a country's economic prosperity can have repercussions on relations between groups in a multi-ethnic society. The danger of alienation among some ethnic groups could accentuate ethnic tensions, albeit the emergence of an 'ethnic economy' may not be so imminent in Trinidad.[4]

Secondly, the sovereignty of the nation-state is compromised in the process of globalization and regional integration. This is an extremely sensitive area, especially in states composed of a plural society and when the state is the largest employer. Ethnic groups might feel threatened and this could result in shifting ethnic involvement. This compromise of a most crucial element of the nation-state can set the process of ethnic re-configuration in the form of renewed historical claims for autonomy and these claims can manifest themselves at cultural, political and economic levels. Barry Smart (1993:149) aptly points out that as the volume of global flows have increased at an unprecedented rate, the associated 'disjunctures' has also become more fluid and uncertain.

"But if an increase in global flows has contributed to the 'deterritorialisation' of populations, commodities, money, images and ideas, the consequence has not so much been in the direction of cultural homogenisation as the reconstitution or regeneration of differences in and through displacement".

The emergence of a global economy has resulted in the increasing diffusion of identical consumer goods and greater homogenization of market rules. Even as the state has tended to become internationalized, counter reactions have developed - resurgence of conflicts in the form of local movements and the rise of ethnic, cultural and regional identities, so that the conflict is then between economic integration and political separatism (Sideri, 1997). The Basque region in Spain is a case in point. The Basque cultural identity seems to emerge stronger owing to regional integration and their demand for 'autonomy'. Globalization and regionalization are indeed giving rise to reactions from peoples across the globe. Within the European Union, economic globalization and the acceleration of the integration process coincided with stagnation of living standards, rising unemployment and greater social inequality. This insecurity in certain parts of Europe has increased xenophobia as people begin to react against cultural diversification, even multi-ethnic European societies (Castells 1998:326-329). The process of changing ethnic configurations can be captured in the Figure 2. This model is based on Albert O. Hirschman's (1979) *Shifting Involvements*.

Figure 2 – Push-Pull Model of Ethnic (Re)configuration
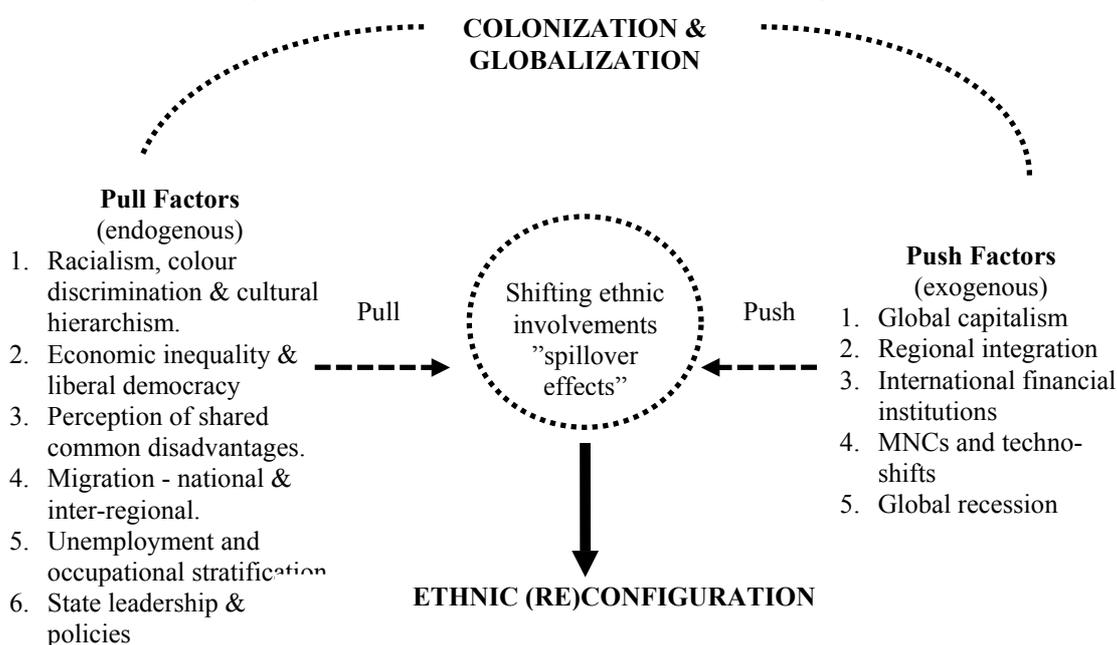
Problems often arise when various social groups are displaced within the labor market and the subsequent patterns of inequality might reinforce ethnic mobilization (pull factors). The erosion of national sovereignty, structural adjustments and increasing globalization can reconfigure and unleash new forms of demands from below, be it sub-nationalsim, or ethnicism or fundamentalism. Therefore, what may emerge as ethnic

disputes can also be embedded in economic marginalization and redistribution of resources, particularly in societies with a historical experience of social stratification and segmentation (UNRISD, 1995:7). In the Caribbean context, the limited degree of employment in the industrial sector and displacement from agricultural sector will make the public sector jobs an area of competition. This is because the state in the Caribbean has been one of the major mechanisms of redistribution via the patronage system. Given the political proclivities, struggle may emerge in the form of "re-mobilization" - party and trade union - along ethnic lines, thereby reconfiguring the political boundaries of ethnic groups.

It seems evident that the ethnicity has been going through a constant process of change. There is a relationship between the pull and push factors and at times they are concomitant. What is interesting is that the primordialist approach can be of little help in explaining these ethnic changes. As stated in the introduction, ethnic identities are neither ascribed nor achieved; they are both. The process of ethnic change is complex involving economics, politics and sociology. Depending on the particular conjuncture – both at the micro and macro levels – at a given point of time, ethnic identities can undergo changes.

Finally, the push-pull model used in this essay is not a static one, rather it is a dynamic one. The model when adapted to the instrumentalist approach help explain conditions and circumstances that can alter ethnic configurations over time.

Notes

1   Harewood, 1971: 267-293; Camejo, 1971; Parris 1985: 97-108. These studies have indicated to different forms of patronage with regards to job recruitment. The PNM's political monopoly has no doubt increased the scope for political patronage in state sector, but this cannot be said to hold true in the present context. Likewise the upward economic mobility of East Indian groups, particularly in the professions and business does not lend much support to studies indicating ethnic discrimination.

2   These apprehensions were very much evident at the *Conference on the role of Calypso and Chutney in Contemporary Trinidad and Tobago Society* (April 3, 1998), organized by ISER, University of West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad. It was indeed interesting to listen to the floor discussions where representatives of the Indo-Trinidadian Hindu community voiced their displeasure at certain Calypso artists (Afro-Trinidadians) for songs that apparently made fun of the Indo-Trinidadian community. The conference also brought to my awareness the interesting fact that there is a conscious effort to revive traditional classical North Indian music. What was even more evident and fascinating was that this revival is taking place in a very 'hybrid' manner – i.e. a creolized context.

3 The annual Indian Pageant held in San Fernando illustrates this point. I was impressed with the stage settings depicting Indian scenes, the parade of latest Indian designer costumes for the Indian beauty contest, and the dance sequence settings to the latest Indian Hindi film songs, all this in addition to the hybrid '*chutney*' music. It is a common sight in Trinidad to see women dressed in '*salwaar kameez*'. Once again, all these expressions are taking place within a creolized context in Trinidad.

4 An ethnic economy exists whenever an ethnic minority maintains a private economic sector in which it has a controlling ownership stake. The ethnic economy's boundaries distinguish where a group has penetrated, taking jobs made available. See Light & Karageorgis (1994: 647-671).

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